

Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Autumn 2004 No. 94

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE MEN GONE?

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In early September the *Sunday Times* reported that for the first time next year would see more women being ordained than men. The precise meaning and origin of the statistic is not clear but they give a figure of 124 women to 123 men which looks like the figure for 'stipendiary / non-stipendiary' ordinations. In the other two categories where statistics are published, that is 'permanent non-stipendiary' and 'ordained local ministry', there have already been more women than men in recent years.

The *Sunday Times* whilst just as enthusiastic in promoting the gay agenda as its sister paper, *The Times*, has been far more ambivalent towards women priests and the feminist cause. The paper goes on to report:

"As the number of women priests has increased, so has the proportion of women attending church. Church researchers say that the 45% to 55% male to female split in parish congregations 10 years ago has now shifted to a 37% to 63% split in favour of women." Again, no source is cited.

The report draws attention to this 'feminisation of the Church' and quotes David Martin, a sociologist, as saying that 'over time the priesthood will become increasingly a female profession'. In a somewhat different publication, *Parish and Parson*, the Rev John Masding describes this as the 'MothersUnionization of the Church'. In 1992 John predicted that because of the low stipend the ministry would increasingly become a "job for women who depend mainly upon the husband's salary".

If the figures cited are correct then in 2005 there will be 123 men ordained to stipendiary/non-stipendiary ministry. This compares to an average of 267 men per year being ordained as 'full-time stipendiary clergy' over the years 1991-1993 (averaged because those three year were slightly erratic). Therefore, over the decade or so since the legislation to ordain women was passed the number of men going into full-time ministry has more than halved. This is a shocking statistic illustrating the truth of what the *Sunday Times* and others have drawn attention to.

Falling clergy numbers

The 2002 Statistics just released by the Church bear witness to the impact of this on the numbers in ministry. At the end of 2002 there were 8416 'full-time stipendiary parochial clergy' a drop of 122 over the year which means that each Diocese had to cut 3 full-time parochial clergy posts over the year.

The figures given in the report for all 'Diocesan Clergy' (parochial, non-parochial and 'dignitaries') show the numbers of men and women. From 2001 to 2002 the number of women increased by 68 to 1262 but the number of men fell by 238 to 7,920, a fall of nearly 3% in one year. When we look back to 1993 we see that the number of men in ministry has fallen by nearly 2,000 almost 1 in every 5.

How does this compare to the mix of men and women in the churches? If the statistics given by the *Sunday Times* are accurate then we can combine them with the recently released figures for 'Usual Sunday Attendance' to get a rough picture of the changing composition of parishes.

In 1992 in a Church of England parish the attendance (across the different churches and services) would have been

31 men, 38 women and 17 children.

In 2002 the attendance would have been

22 men, 37 women and 12 children.

That is to say that over the decade the number of women in churches has fallen, but only modestly (just less than 3%) whereas the number of children and the number of men have fallen in roughly equal proportion, by more than three out of every ten.

Why are men leaving the Church of England so rapidly and why are so few men now coming forward for ordained ministry? Here we leave statistics and enter conjecture and anecdote. It seems to me that part of the reason that some men have left and others not joined is that the God-given pattern of male headship is being broken in our churches. Whether consciously or unconsciously I believe many men feel this deep down, because that is how God made us, even if they do not understand it.

Moreover, although a lot of attention has been given to the decline in the number of children in our churches it seems reasonable to suggest that if we get back the men we will get back at least some of the children because those men who are also fathers will want to take seriously the responsibilities laid on them as head of the household.